DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 403 019 PS 024 785

AUTHOR Onsman, Yulia
TITLE Parent Participation Rights and Responsibilities: A True Partnership between Home and School.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Australia and New Zealand Conference (6th, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, January 9-12, 1996).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Early Childhood Education; Foreign Countries; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Participation; Parent Responsibility; Parent School Relationship; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; Primary Education; School Orientation; *School Readiness; Student Adjustment; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Australia

ABSTRACT

The focus on parent participation in the Australian school community has intensified over the last few years, but both parents and teachers still hold many erroneous notions with regard to their shared responsibilities. Rather than viewing parents and teachers as two separate camps with children in the middle, it must be recognized that cooperation advances both groups' goal of ensuring children's educational success. A child's transition to school can be very emotional for the parent as well as the child, and teachers who understand this and behave appropriately toward parents engender positive attitudes in them, and in turn, in their children. Parents' knowledge must be treated with respect by teachers, and it should be further developed through training sponsored by the government. Such training would enable more effective parent participation in schools in the future. Pre-kindergarten sessions in which parents and children become familiar with the school system and its members are also very helpful. Parental responsibilities, so important to children's welfare, might be included as a code of conduct in orientation materials distributed during school enrollment. Finally, there is a difference between parent involvement, which includes volunteer activities that help in the day-to-day functioning of the school, and parent participation, which is a contribution to the decision-making processes of the school. Parents should be encouraged to contribute what they are able, but involvement should not be confused for participation. (EV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 403 019

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PARENT PARTICIPATION RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITES (A True partnership between home and school)

Yulia Onsman

President
Tasmanian Council of State School Parents and Friends Associations
Presenting Author

PS 024285

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Yulia Onsman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT SUMMARY

The focus on participation within the school community has intensified dramatically over the last few years. There are still many outdated and erroneous notions held by both teachers and parents in regard to the shared responsibilites of ensuring children move through their educational years in a happy positive and successful manner. This paper is an attempt to clear away some of those notions, to show that educators and parents do have a common goal and to give a few sugestions on the ways in which a good working relationship can be established from the early years onwards.

PARENT PARTICIPATION

A TRUE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN HOME & SCHOOL

My purpose in presenting this paper today is to explore in a positive manner what the ideal partnership between educators and parents could be and some of the ways in which such a partnership could be achieved. I believe that it would not be so very difficult to achieve.

Sometimes it seems that there are two distinct camps. Parents on one side and teachers on the other and of course the children inevitably in the middle. Yet it seems to me that it is almost impossible to draw such clear lines between the two. Many teachers are also parents and most parents see them selves as their child's first educators. Both have at heart a genuine desire to see the child move smoothly and productively through the years of schooling. After all most parents these days make a conscious decision to have a child and are committed to his/her upbringing, and most teachers these days are teaching because they have a genuine desire to teach - in other words it isn't just a job, particularly in the early years.

I believe it is important for any discussion on a topic such as this to keep that firmly in sight - everyone genuinely wants the best for the child - and the best for the child is when parents and teachers work well together. So how do we achieve this. In this forum we are concerned with the early years of a child's education so lets focus on that area.

Take the following scenario.
Little Johnny is about to start on his educational path. He is just four years old. He has a brand new backpack containing his brand new lunchbox and brand new drink flask for his morning tea. He is wildly excited (or shy or painfully nervous or just plain terrified) School is a huge new adventure. He eagerly drags his mum up the steps of the kinder (or mum drags him up the steps of the kinder) Mum helps him hang his backpack on the hook with his name on it and they head for the kinder room door. There they find lots of other kids and mums all milling about. Suddenly it's time for the class to start and mum has to go. For the first time in four years mum has to leave her precious little bundle to the care of someone else. Ah I hear you say what about all the kids that have been in care since they were six weeks old? True a lot of children have spent time in either a child care centre or with a carer in the years before school but that still isn't quite the same as starting school. Starting school is something else entirely it is a new phase in a child's life and it is still seen that way by a great majority of parents. Suddenly their baby is growing up. School is the start of a whole new chapter. A chapter where he/she will now spend a good deal of their time in the care and company of someone else - someone who will become important to Johnny. He will learn to trust them, love them and respect them , all things that up until this time have been his mum's rewards.

At this stage mum is filled with a variety of emotions. Here is her beautiful little bundle of joy. She cared for him and nurtured him, taught him to walk and talk and generally prepared him for life.

PS 024785

Four years of devoted attention to this most wonderful of creations and suddenly she is expected to hand him over and have total trust and faith that a complete stranger will be as capable of giving him the same undivided 110% attention and devotion as she herself has done. On top of the "separation anxiety attack" that mum is experiencing, she is also remembering her own school experiences. A generation ago school was a very different place. Many of today's parents had negative school experiences - long time ago perhaps - but let us remember that young children are very impressionable and memories are long. Even though it looks like a grown up walking through the school gate inside that grownup is a sometimes frightened five or six year old.

I believe that a component of teacher training should cover dealing with parents who are bringing their child to school for the first time. It is vital for schools and educators to be able to recognise and deal with what is happening with the parent at this time. The way the parent is handled now will to a large degree determine whether there is continued positive participation in the years to come. I realise that I am emphasising the parent here and not the child who is after all the one starting school life. Well this paper is about parent participation, but I also believe that the co operation of the parent will determine to a large extent how successful a child is during their school years. I don't just mean encouraging the child to do well at school academically important as that is. I'm talking about the parent being able to "back up" the teacher. A supportive parent is a real plus for any teacher. Simple things such as ensuring the child treats the teacher with respect is something that can make a world of difference in the way the child behaves in the classroom. This in turn reflects on how well they, and for that matter the other children in the class, learn.

A parent who is treated with respect by a teacher is much more likely to return that respect and engender that same attitude in their child. Both parent and teacher must acknowledge each other as people, not "the parent" and "the teacher", but people who must share the responsibility of caring for and educating the child. People who will form a successful and positive partnership for the benefit of the child. As Julie Roberts past President of Tas Council has said "As a parent I would like to share my most precious possession with teachers/schools - not hand them over at four and collect them again at 16 years. It's all about partnership."

I also realise that the start of school is a very busy time for any teacher. Surely the teacher has enough to do trying to cope with the children let alone parents and their feelings? Classrooms are often over crowded and everyone wants the teacher's attention. I agree and therefore wouldn't it be wonderful if the parent was already aware of how the school functions, has already had contact with the teacher and feels fully able to leave her his child with that teacher?

I would like to explore further some ways that parents feel will go a long way towards making the transition to school life a happy one for all concerned Ways which will ensure that parents can enthusiastically participate in their child's educative process, to the benefit of the child the teacher and themselves.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PARENTS

No more "leave it to the professionals, you don't understand." If we don't understand explain

it to us. The brain cells don't disappear with the afterbirth, nor do they drain away with the breastmilk.
No one in this world is going to be as vitally interested in the well being of our children as each one of us is. We want them to do well, we want you to be able to teach them well. I don't need a degree to be a parent. I need lots of experience, patience, love and a whole heap of faith but I don't need to be an academic. What I do need as parent of a school child is to know how the system works, What is best for my child? How do I help you to get the very best from my child. I need to be listened to. If I know my child is not progressing as well as they are capable of, I need to be able to say that to you without being brushed of and told to "leave it to the professionals". Again this comes back to mutual respect and working in partnership. Most of al it comes back to educating me as a parent to understand the school system.

Now before you roll your eyes heavenward and say "where do I find the time for this", rest assured that I am not advocating that teachers should be responsible for professional development of parents. I do believe that Education systems have such a responsibility. All over Australia parents are being asked to take on roles in schools that ten or twenty years ago simply were not thought of and we are expected to do that without any kind of formal training.

I believe that parent training is the responsibility of the Federal Government. It could be effectively conducted through organisations such as ACSSO and could be funded by a recurring grant. It would be extremely cost effective in the long term, particularly as parents would then be able to participate in an effective and meaningful way in the school community.

To compliment this I would like to see a component in teacher training on how to communicate effectively with parents. If we all start of knowing the system knowing how to communicate effectively together and knowing what our responsibilities and rights are then we will work together effectively.

PRE - KINDER SESSIONS

many schools have already introduced pre kinder sessions and I believe them to be invaluable for children and parents. My own son started kindergarten last year. Even though he is the youngest of three and I have always been actively involved in my school community, he is my baby and probably my last child. Added to that my two older children attended a small cottage school for their first years of schooling, so the public kindergarten was a new experience for me.

The pre kinder sessions run during the previous year were simply wonderful. The first two terms we simply attended a playgroup at the kinder each Friday morning. Jack got to know the kids, I got to know the other parents and we all go to know the teachers. During term three the structure of the sessions changed so that we still had one hour of playgroup but the second hour the children were left with the teachers. By the time Jack started kinder officially both of us felt comfortable and at ease, with the teachers and the environment. During the previous year I had ample time to converse with the teachers get to know them a little and deal with any worries or concerns I may have had. Getting to know the other parents also helped a great deal. Such a simple method.

Once again I believe that the Federal Government should look at funding these sessions and ensure that they are available to all children before they commence school. When Jack did start school his teacher didn't have to deal with frightened or crying children or apprehensive parents, which in itself would have been a huge plus.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Parents need to be made aware of their responsibilities both toward the child and the teacher. By far the great majority of parents want their child to have a positive learning experience and are willing to make personal contributions to achieve this. However it must also be said that there are parents who see school as a child care centre. Who drop their child at the gate and pick them up at the gate and only see the inside of the school when they go to pay the levies. There is also a small group of parents who act irresponsibly toward the child as well as the school. Though thankfully this is a small minority.

Having said that, it is important that parents make sure that their child has breakfast before they come to school. That exposure to television particularly before school is kept to a minimum. That the child is provided with adequate lunch and morning tea. That the child is taught to behave in a well mannered way. That the child is encouraged to complete any homework in later years. Inconsequential as these things seem they can make the difference between the teacher being able to teach the child well or having to cope with an unruly child

I believe that a code of conduct for parents, a list of their responsibilities both toward the child and the school should be included with the enrolment forms when the child commences school. This could take the form of a booklet which could also include parents rights.

INVOLVEMENT VERSUS PARTICIPATION

In Tasmnaia in 1994 the Minister for Education launched the Parent Participation Policy. This policy is aimed at allowing and encouraging parents within the state school system to take a much broader role in the management of the school. I believe other states are encouraging the same practices.

This policy defines parent participation as "The many ways parents contribute to their own children's education, both at home and at school. It also refers to the work and decision making that parents do at school, as individuals or as members of groups (such as school councils or parents and friends associations), that enrich the education of all children in the school."

It has to be recognised by educators that there are many different levels at which parents feel able to be involved in their child's educational process. Parents do have the right to choose their level of involvement according to the time and skills they have available to them. We must always remember that the time and energy given by parents is of a volunteer nature, and should be valued as such.

Having said that it should also be recognised that there are two different levels of involvement. Either one is an important contribution by the parent to the school and should be recognised as such.

Parent Involvement - means to contribute to the school community by volunteering for fundraising activities, teacher's help, canteen work, library work - all very necessary for our under resourced schools. Put simply parent involvement is those things that contribute to the school in such a way as to enhance the day to day running of the school.

Parent Participation - means contributing to the decision making processes of the school by sitting on the School Council and participating in the formulation of the management plan of the school.

Many educators still see involvement as participation. This can cause problems for parents. On the one hand the government is telling them that the management of the school is now a community responsibility. Parents are being asked to make contributions at every level of school life as well as more and more substantial financial contributions. However when they do go into the schools the message from some teachers is a conflicting one. Tasks such as helping in the canteen, fundraising and teachers help in the classroom are all necessary and valid, but parents have an complete range of untapped skills. They are also vitally interested in what is being taught to their children. Parents being there is often devalued. Just being at the school regularly makes you part of the school. Teachers must be aware that parents need to be and want to be involved in every area of school life. Areas such as deciding where school funds will be allocated and what the educational priorities for their children's school will be.

SUMMARY

These are just a few suggestions towards creating a working partnership between educators and parents. As parents we are aware that it is not an easy thing to be a teacher these days. Crowded classrooms, lack of resources , totally inadequate funding, a hugely extended curriculum and unsympathetic governments that just don't seem to understand or care. We are aware of all these things. We want to see the focus shift to the needs of the children. We want to see funding based on educational needs rather than government whims. We want the curriculum needs of all children met - not what is easiest for the average or the most cost effective. Dollars spent in the first years will make for strong and sound foundations throughout a child's learning.

We understand the pressures that you as educators are placed under and we want to help. We want to work with you to ensure a good educational outcome for our children. So please communicate with us. If we seem a bit hesitant please persist. Listen to our concerns and encourage us to participate. Believe me the support you gain from having us there will be well worth it. For you as educators, for us as parents and above all for the children.

References

Parent Participation Policy - Dept of Education and the Arts, Tasmania